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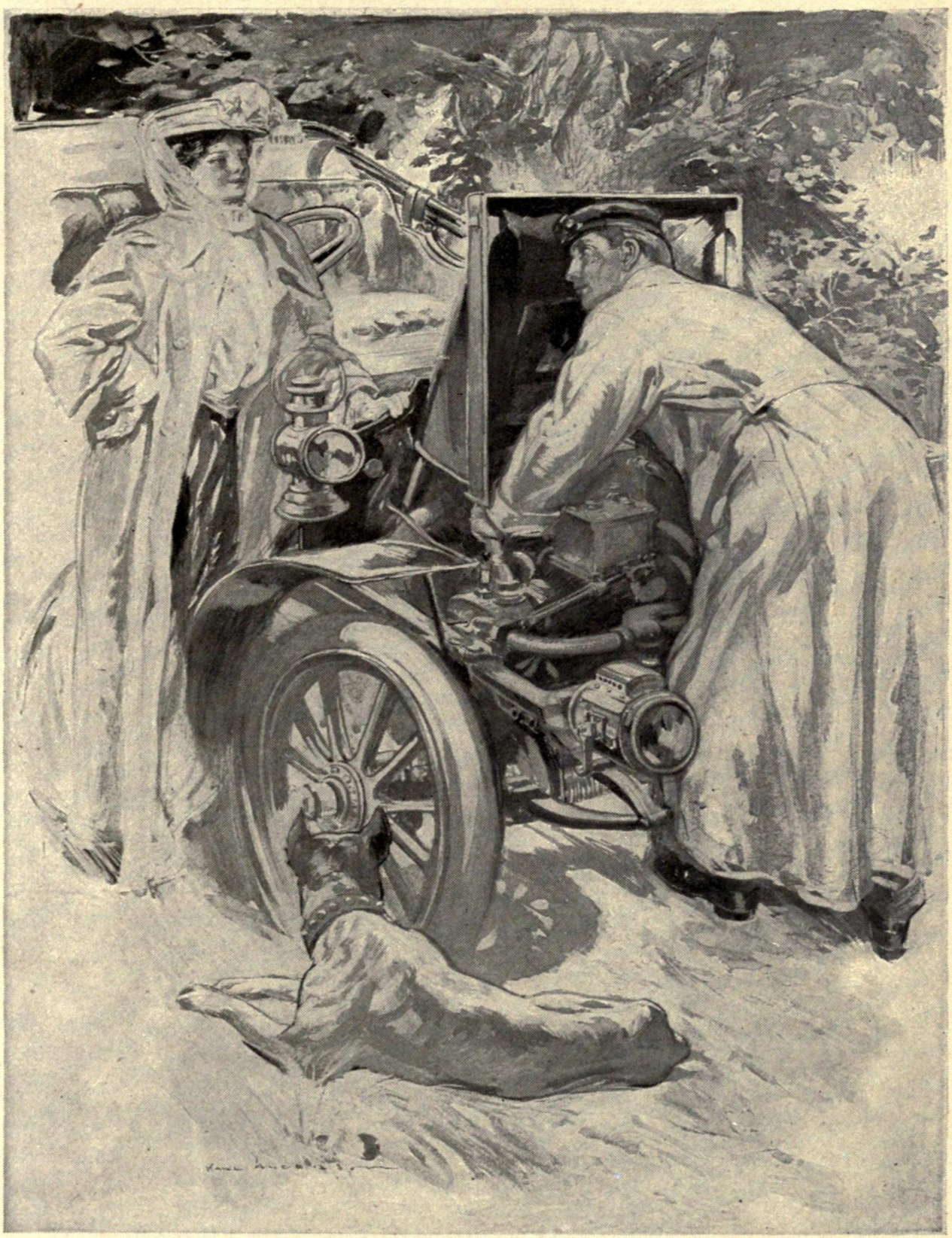
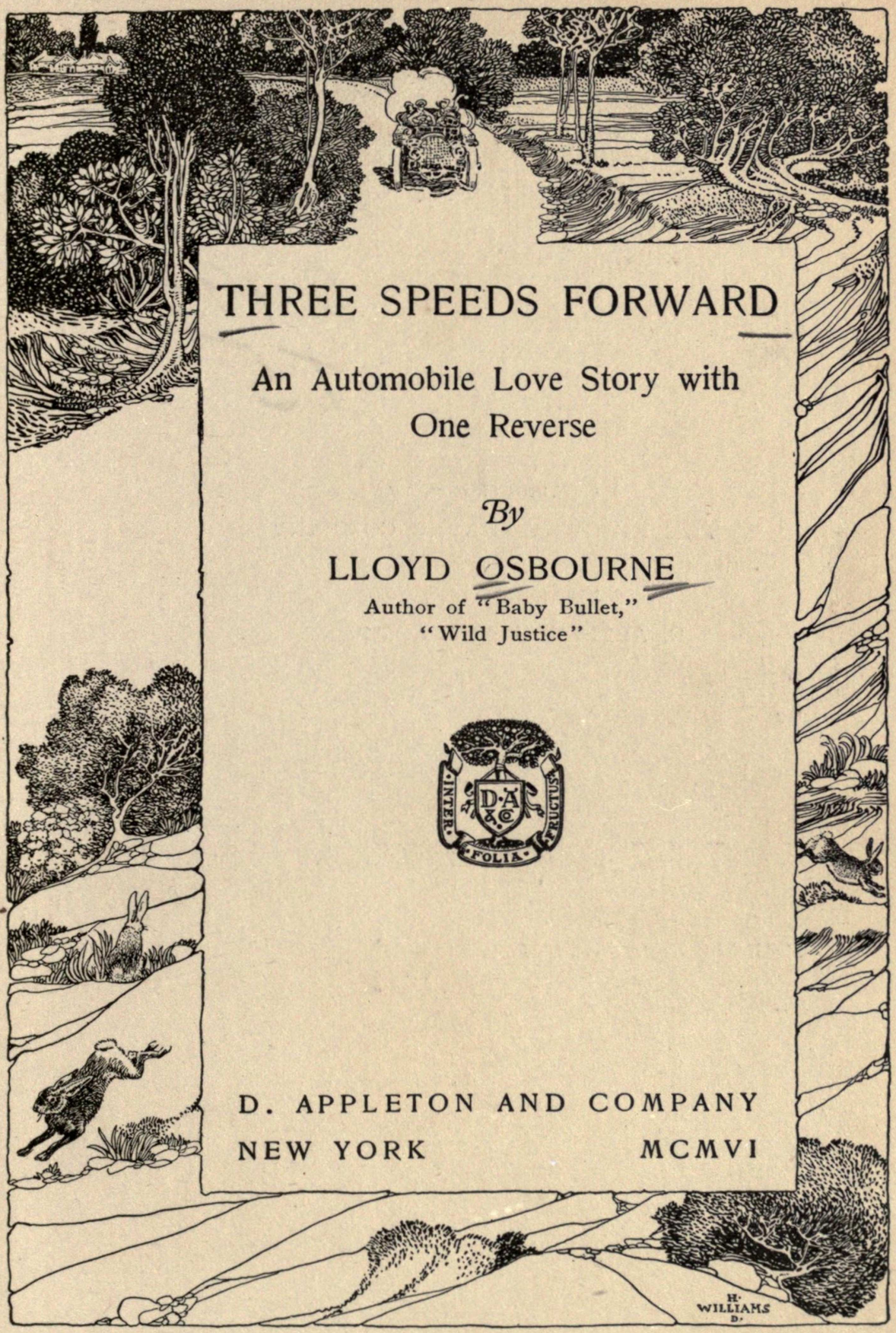
THREE SPEEDS FORWARD



"'Why do all you people dislike me so much?'"



THREE SPEEDS FORWARD

An Automobile Love Story with One Reverse

By

LLOYD OSBOURNE

Author of "Baby Bullet,"
"Wild Justice"

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK MCMVI

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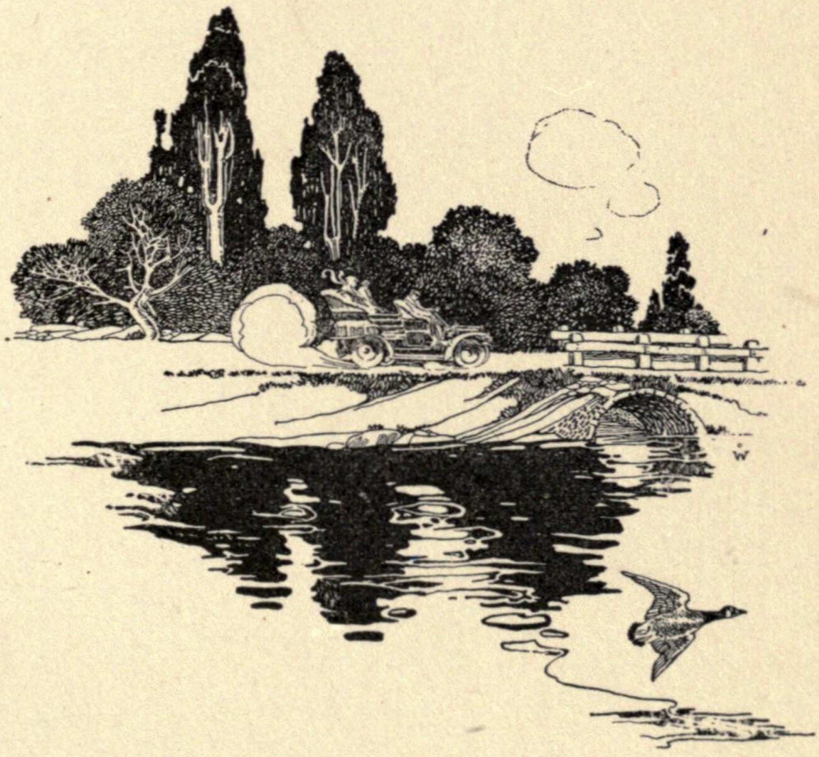
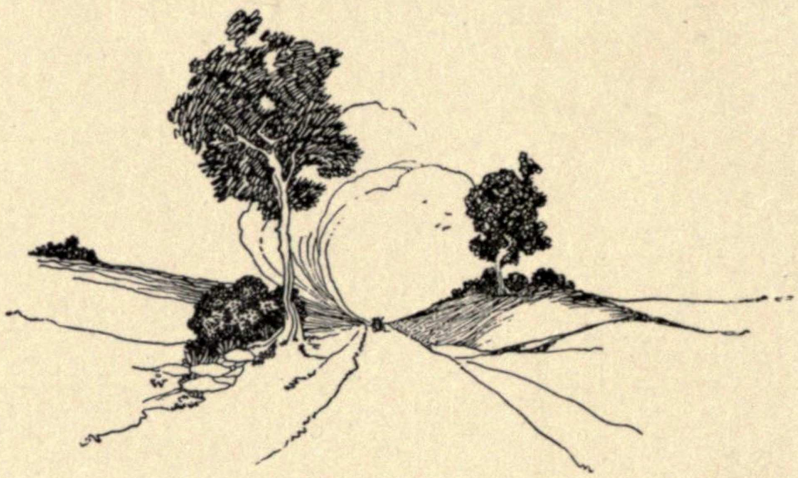
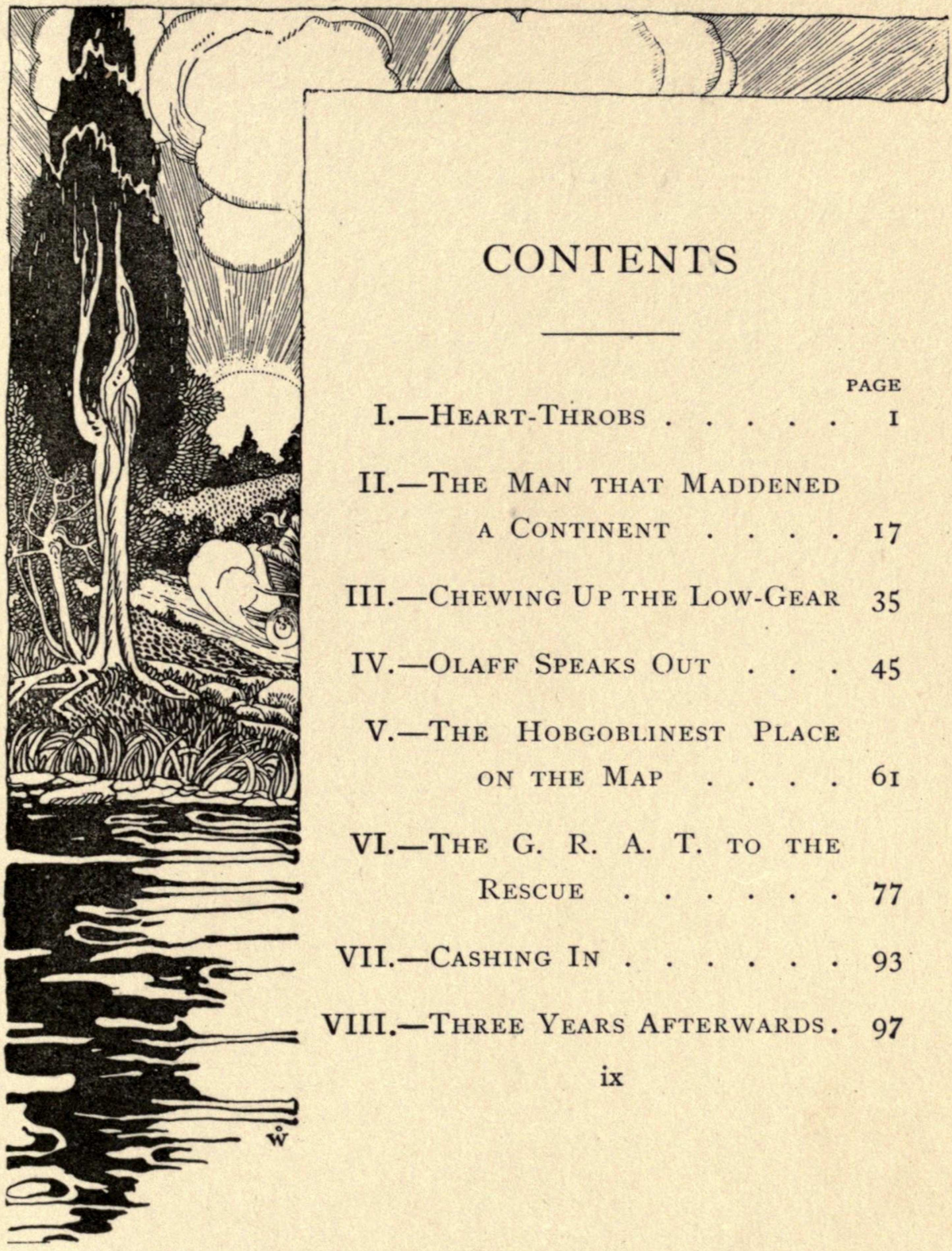






CONTENTS

PAGE

I.—Heart-Throbs 1

II.—The Man that Maddened a Continent 17

III.—Chewing Up the Low-Gear 35

IV.—Olaff Speaks Out . . . 45

V.—The Hobgoblinest Place on the Map 61

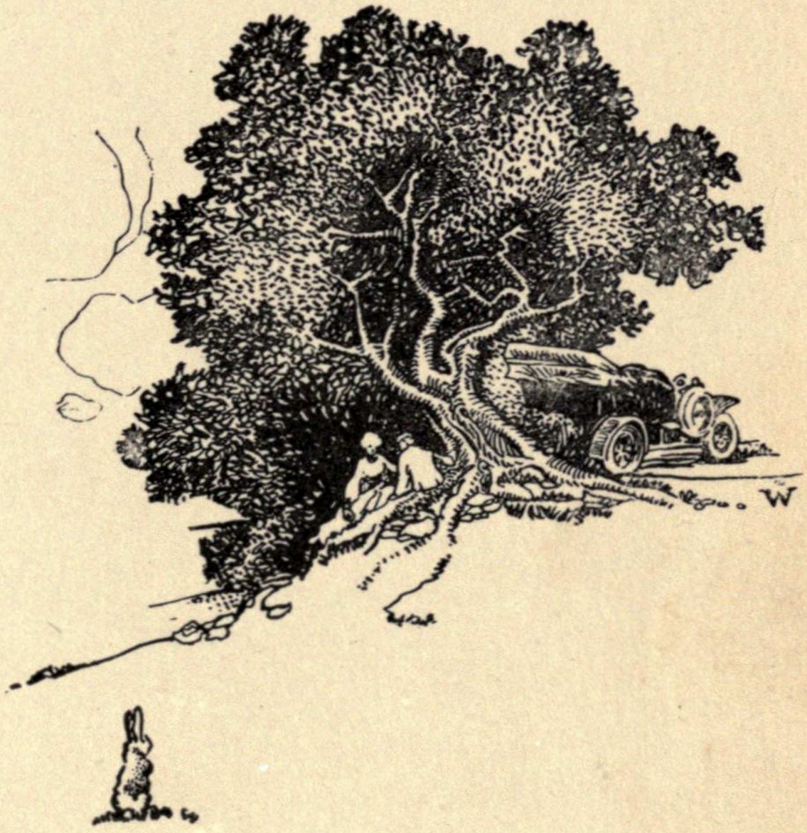
VI.—The G. R. A. T. to the Rescue 77

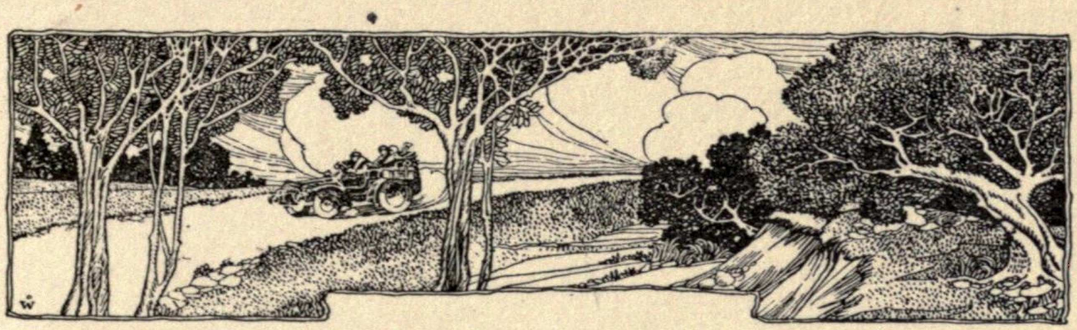
VII.—Cashing In 93

VIII.—Three Years Afterwards. 97

I

HEART–THROBS





I

HEART–THROBS

I HADN'T been engaged to Charlie Lepperts a week before I began to suspect my mistake. I spent a second week making allowances, and doing my best to see his "good side." At the end of the third week I decided he hadn't any, and by the fourth we were at daggers drawn. I don't know how I ever got myself into such a silly tangle. It wasn't altogether my fault, and you must remember, besides, I was only nineteen, and a good deal of a kid. It all came about through his being

boomed in advance, and all of us having made up our minds that he was the biggest prize in the young-man line that was ever likely to come our way.

Then, too, his father and mother were quite the nicest people in Studdingham, and they shed a tone over us all, that papa said enhanced the value of real estate from here to Wiskigee. They were not only rich, for we were all that, more or less—Tonyham and Richville being the slang names for Studdingham outside—but they were tremendously cultured and refined, and good form to us always meant what the Lepperts said and did. The State was a pretty new State, and this idea of being " smart " had only struck us yesterday; and so it was natural for the rest of us to venerate people who had used finger bowls for three generations, and had struggled with butlers and liveried footmen, when people like papa were eating out of tin plates, and pioneering railroads through the alkali.

Of course, I don't blame the Lepperts for

having boomed Charlie in the way they did. He was their only son, and who could find fault with them for thinking him a paragon? They were forever talking about him, and bragging about him, and making us all crinkle with suspense and anticipation. Whenever there were four or five of us girls together, Mrs. Lepperts would say, in that arch and gracious manner that always reminded passing Englishmen of Queen Victoria: "Ah, who of you little buds is going to capture Prince Charlie?" And a tiny voice inside me always answered—to myself, of course—"Why, I am, to be sure!" And so the situation was ripe for what actually happened when he did come. I went into the scramble head-down, and didn't really have a good look at the prize till after I had grabbed it.

Then the disillusion came, and the rupture and the fuss and the gossip and the heartbreak generally. He was nice enough to look at, though rather pale, and aggravatingly languid and superior. Much more of a gentle-

man outside than in, and therefore deceptive. Sixteen coats of piano varnish—but the chassis of a cad. Indeed, when he tried, he could be very charming; and he caught our eye by his showy horsemanship, his unmistakable elegance and fashion, and a deprecatory fastidiousness, as of a prince in exile, condemned to make the best of a social Siberia. He had a knack for insinuation; and while it was impossible to pin him down to any straight-out lies, he was the worst slanderer and mischief-maker that ever lived. That's where I came in, you know, for, after we had broken it off, he deliberately set himself to get even—starting those little snowballs that grow as they run, till you find yourself dodging mountains.

Not that I knew anything of this till later—very soon later, I can assure you. All I did was to tell him, quite simply, that I had made an awful mistake, and didn't seem to like him nearly as much as I thought I had; and then I went off, and proceeded to break my heart. No, not for him—the idea!—but from shame

and misery at having made such a little fool of myself, and given rise to such hurricanes of chatter. And, more than anything, at Charlie's misrepresenting the affair, as though it had been his doing, instead of the other way about. And as I was too proud and shy and hurt to contradict it, I was exposed to the worst thing of all—people being sorry for me, and old cats saying, "What a narrow squeak that poor, dear boy had!"

Then I began to have headaches and die away, till the doctors said I'd have to go on a sea voyage, or East on a visit to my aunt's. I wasn't so terribly, awfully, dreadfully, horribly sick, but I didn't eat much, and lay a lot on the sofa, and thought how nice it would be to have a runabout. This was an old fight between papa and me. I had wanted one for years, and he had objected to one for years; and now, at last, like Sindbad in the tunnel, I began to see gleams of daylight. What was the use of always rubbing in our big four-cylinder Dauntless? The manufacturers had

told papa that if he had a coachman, that was all the care it needed; and so it was given over to Albert, whose one idea was to shine it up beautifully and keep it tight in the barn. In the morning he took papa to the railway station, three miles off, and called back for him every afternoon at five; and this baby-carriage performance was supposed to leave it exhausted for all the intervening hours. On Sundays, Albert would take us all for a solemn drive on the second speed, and if we covered forty miles, he acted as though we had crossed the continent. Between papa, who was mortally afraid of Albert, and Albert, who was mortally afraid of the car, our bubbling was a good deal of the hearsey-hearse order, and not as satisfying as a ride on the trolley.

What I wanted was a little car of my own, in a little house of my own, with my own grease, my own cotton waste, my own gasoline supply—and all this as far away from Albert as it could possibly be put. And the sicker

I got the more I wanted it, till finally papa, in sheer desperation, handed down the moon, and an expert came from Wiskigee to teach me how to run it. It was a little Maxwell, ten-horse, horizontal double-opposed, speeding up to thirty-five miles on the level, everything incased, and the cooling thermo-syphon. I took bounds of recovery from that moment, and a fresh bound every time I managed to coax an extra out of papa. A bound for my baskets, a bound for my Jones speedometer, a bound for my Latham spirals, a bound for my search lights, and two more for a yellow Cape top and a new coil, found me so pink and well that I was forced to buy two wet cells out of my poor little allowance. (Don't you prefer voltage batteries? *I* do.)

I was in the mood when people were a torment to me, and I wanted to get away from everything and everybody. Studdingham was so small that there wasn't room in it for a pair that hated each other as much as I and Charlie Lepperts. Had he been any way a gentleman,

he would have gone away, but he stayed instead, and so it fell to me to get out into the tall grass. At dinners, dances, picnics—everywhere—there was always Charlie Lepperts with his pale face and sneering smile; and though I bore up well enough when I had to, these meetings humiliated me, and I grew more and more to avoid them.

At last I drew out entirely, and people learned it was no use inviting me. I preferred to whisk about all day in my little Maxwell, with seldom any other company than my dog Olaff and a spare tire. But when a girl is badly hurt—heart hurt—she instinctively turns to doing good. When you are happy, I suppose it is too big a bore, and it's an old saying that misery loves company. Studdingham was a very poor field for philanthropy, but I chased up a pimply orphan, took Mrs. Agnew's trained nurse for a few rides, and discovered an exasperating nursery governess who was convalescing from typhoid. Not that I spent my whole time doing good, but at long

intervals, when I felt unusually discouraged or sad. As a rule, I wasn't either, and then couldn't be bothered—spinning all day through the prettiest country imaginable, with my honest old Olaff on the seat beside me, and my tireless little engine going *chi-chi-chi-chi* under its hood. How soothing and sweet that sound is to anyone who has the ear for it—the unfailing explosion, the consciousness of perfect mixture, the humming of the coils, and the rhythm of a beautifully balanced reciprocity! *Chi-chi-chi-chi,* till you are lulled into dreams, and the wind against your cheek seems to fan away all the little cares and heartaches of a dreary world. You see, I invariably strained my gasoline through chamois leather, and thus eliminated carburetor troubles entirely. If people would always take the trouble to do this *religiously,* and keep their terminals *tight,* and not grudge a few dollars for a *voltometer,* they'd eliminate most of the troubles connected with a chug-cart.

It was a strange life for a girl to lead—one, I mean, who had been so popular and had gone everywhere, and had counted for so much in the gayeties of Studdingham. Some of the boys didn't seem able to get used to it at all, and pretended to be awfully cut up—which was nice of them, and a compliment—though it wasn't enough to get the canary back into the cage. I was out of humor with the things I used to like, and kind of man-hating and moody; and I wouldn't have traded Dandy Dick (which was the name I called the Maxwell car) for a full-fledged prince, with an ancestral castle and curly hair. No, I wanted to be alone, and free to bubble-bubble-bubble from morn till night, and recover in the open air and trees something that I seemed to have lost.

Of course, I was alive to the romantic side of it, and didn't spare any pains to look as pretty as I could, and wear the most killing clothes. Dropping out absolutely, and yet remaining conspicuous—every day sizzling

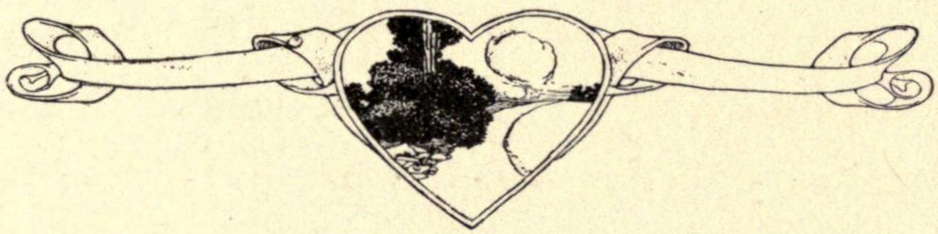
through the friends I had long ceased to have anything to do with, except to tootle them out of the road and drown them in the exhaust. Morbid, if you like, but tremendously soothing and soul-sustaining, for you can't really enjoy being a recluse unless there are stacks of people looking on. Perhaps you'll think I was posey and silly. It may be that I was. It is hard for a girl to be a hundred per cent sincere, when ninety-eight per cent of her is numb, like the poor wretches hypnotists run pins into; and I guess all my top skin was frozen.

I was still comfortably enjoying the sensation I was making, when Studdingham, with the fickleness of all audiences, suddenly concentrated its attention elsewhere. A person named George Marsden popped into public notice and shook the foundations of society by coming to live with us. I mean, he bought the great big splendid Howard place, that had been shut up for years, and got ahead of the Vincents, who had been slowly negotiating for

it for six months. Now, everybody wanted the Vincents. Jim Vincent's sister had married the Duke of Porchester, and they were horribly important and swell, and we had watched them through all the stages of coming to Studdingham, liking Studdingham, falling in love with Studdingham, and finally announcing their determination to live and die in Studdingham. It seemed they couldn't do the last two unless they bought the Howard place, which was a dream of everything mossy, aristocratic, and beautiful, with terraced gardens, and stables a mile big. And they were not only horribly important, as I have already said, but so gay and young and unaffected and sociable that we adored them for themselves.

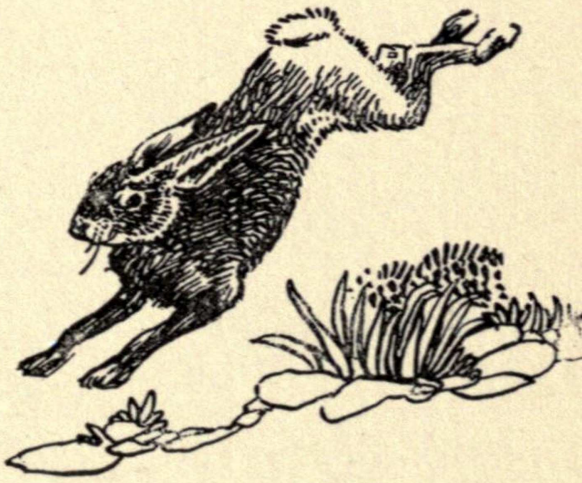
Imagine the feelings of Studdingham, therefore, when this Marsden creature walked up, planked down his check, and insolently slammed the door, so to speak, in the faces of the Vincents, whose furniture was on the way, and who were confidently waiting for

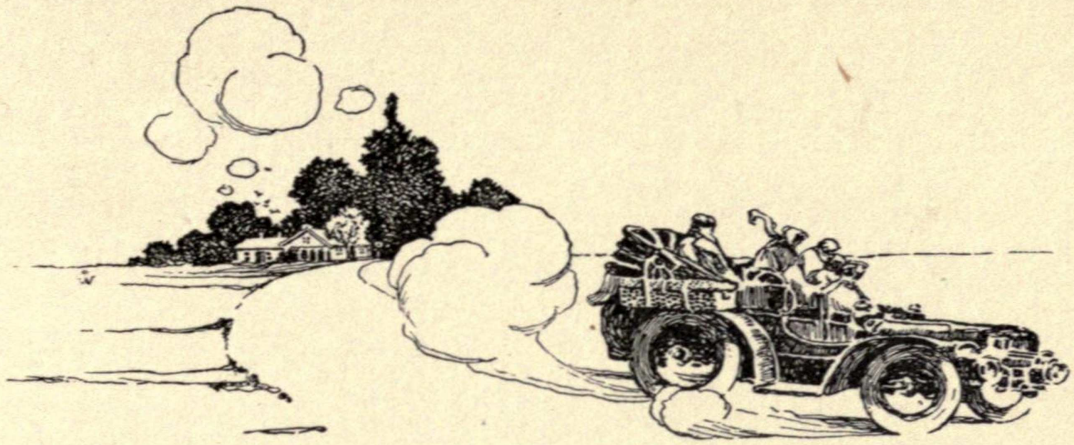
the Howard trustees to snip thirty thousand off the price. And so Mr. Marsden arrived, quite unconscious that a frenzied community was thirsting for his blood, and modestly installed himself in the powder magazine.



II

THE MAN THAT MADDENED A CONTINENT





II

THE MAN THAT MADDENED A CONTINENT

STUDDINGHAM was one of those swagger little places that had been taken care of before it was born. You couldn't build a house that cost less than ten thousand; you couldn't sell liquor, open a shop or hotel, manufacture anything, teach music, keeps pigs, burn soft coal, expose advertisements, dig wells or cesspools, mine, or generate acetylene gas. Forty lawyers had spent years in tying the infant Studding-

ham into bow-knots, and concocting what papa called "a deed of don'ts." Their success had been a matter of general congratulation, and, after nine years, it was left to this Marsden to find a crack in the legal wall. He was the manufacturer, proprietor, and inventor of the Bo-peep Puzzle!

You surely remember it? Twelve little Noah's-ark sheep, and a dolly shepherdess, and a checkerboard with three kinds of squares—with an unintelligible book of directions, and the look of its being childishly simple—till you took it up in a weak moment, and did nothing else for the next six months! No doubt you went crazy over it, like the rest of us, and bo-peeped and bo-peeped till your brains curdled! I know I did, and papa, and everybody; and we used to see his picture in the ends of the magazines, with big letters under it, calling him, "The Man that has Maddened a Continent!" A nice recruit, wasn't he, for poor little Studdingham, with red-hot aspirations for refinement and good

form, and only just beginning to attract people like the Vincents!

Of course, we had had undesirables before, but we had chased them out very easily. They were usually simple-minded parvenus, who thought they had only to buy a house in order to tuck in socially. When they discovered they had invested their money in a mausoleum, they were as eager to go as we were to speed them, and the even tenor of our aristocratic way was not long disturbed. But the man that had maddened a continent gave us no such handle to expel him. He had come to bury himself in the great empty rooms of the Howard place, and think up fresh mind-rackers in its noble seclusion. Ostracizing him seemed rather an ineffectual weapon, and the situation, if it were to be relieved at all, plainly called for something more drastic. Anyway, Studdingham was simply boiling over with fury; and when the Vincents packed up and left, they were in the humor to tear him limb from limb.

Papa was the angriest of the lot, which was all the more to his credit, as he was by no means a highflyer, and rather pooh-poohed the snobbishness of the place. In fact, he had only settled there originally because, as he said, "they all looked so clean and happy." He was a born suburbanite, and would have lapsed to shirt sleeves and a watering pot if we hadn't sternly headed him off—one of those men who spend all day in ruling a large corporation with a rod of iron, and then return home in the evening to domestic servitude. In the newspaper caricatures he was usually engaged in throttling the State, or cramming his pockets full of legislators, and you wouldn't have thought he was afraid to say "Boo!" to the cook.

I don't know why he had taken such an impulsive liking to the Vincents. As a rule, he had a lazy indifference for newcomers, and let mamma and me do all the pioneer work of making their acquaintance and sizing them up. Even in our little convulsions he was always

the last one to get excited, and preferred to lie back and blow smoke rings while everybody else was screaming. But he had fallen in love with the Vincents right off, and had made tremendous efforts to please and keep them. It was he who had put it into their heads to buy the Howard place, and that at a price that even two swell little innocents could see was a bargain. They were devoted to papa, too, and blindly trusted all the negotiations to him, so he was really to blame for letting Marsden jump in and get the property, while he waited and dillydallied and dickered to save them that thirty thousand. Poor papa! I was awfully sorry for him. He couldn't have been more depressed if a Limited had smashed up and let in the line for a million.

Well, so the Vincents left, and Mr. Marsden sneaked in, and papa went on like a she-bear robbed of its cubs. You only had to say "Marsden" for him to explode, and he spent most of his spare time thinking of ways to run him out. But the puzzle man was ter-

ribly unassailable. He didn't put up his name at the Country Club; didn't try to make any friends; didn't put his head out of his shell for anybody to take a crack at it. The only apparent method of hurting him was to attack him from the outside—bust the puzzle business, and drive him into bankruptcy. But he hadn't been with us a month before he launched "Dobbin, Dobbin, Oh, Where's Dobbin?" and successfully maddened a continent for a second time. I gave papa one of the dollar sizes as a birthday present, but he didn't see any joke in it, and got blacker than a thundercloud. He was sorer than ever about losing the Vincents, and never passed the Howard place without gritting his teeth.

We all waited for Marsden to come out and startle us. We didn't know exactly what he was going to do—but we were sure, sooner or later, that he would do it. Then, as nothing happened, a sort of mystery grew up about him. He hid away in a corner of that vast old house with two German servants, an old man

and an old woman; and as far as any splurge was concerned, he might have been the hired caretaker. I mean, except for his G. R. A. T. car, a forty-horse Austrian giant that used to slip out, mostly at night, and sizzle around like the wind. Papa said he was only trying to pique our curiosity, and that the surest way of getting people to know you, who don't want to know you, is to make them believe you don't want to know them.

Well, it went along like this for ever so long, till one day he actually did make an acquaintance, and—would you believe it?—that acquaintance was *me*. I was hung up on the road when I heard a big car purring up the hill, and when I turned round, I saw it was the G. R. A. T. It swerved for a moment in an undecided manner, passed me, slowed down, and stopped. I looked up from the bonnet, and there was Mr. Marsden getting out. I knew him in a minute from his picture, and, besides, the G. R. A. T. identified him like a passport. He was a startlingly hand-

some man of about thirty, with heaps of reddish-brown hair, and wild gray eyes; tall and spare, with a musician look, and an aquiline nose. I watched him out of the corner of my eye, and held my breath.

"Might I not assist you?" he asked in a delightfully pleasant voice, raising his leather cap.

"Oh, thank you very much—it is nothing," I replied with what I considered the right degree of warmth to offset his courtesy, and yet give him no opening for a talk; and then, as he still stood there smiling, I added, in a please-go-away tone, "a broken porcelain; I'll have it right in a minute."

I was unprepared for his taking the plug out of my hand, which he did in the most matter-of-fact way, like a paid mechanic, and pulled out his knife to widen the points. He was as exasperatingly slow about it as though he had specially arrived from a garage in a trouble wagon.

"Why do all you people dislike me so

much?" he asked abruptly, raising his eyes and meeting mine. "Good heavens, what is the matter? What have I done? What crime have I committed?"

I couldn't help flushing at being asked such a point-blank question. Under the circumstances it struck me as hardly short of an impertinence.

"I do not know what you mean," I said; "and even if I did, I should not care to discuss it with you. Indeed, I'd be obliged if you'd let me fix my car for myself."

"I beg your pardon," he returned, still holding tight to the plug, and gazing down at me in the most disconcerting way. "It isn't that I mind being let alone. In fact, that's why I came here. The house has an atmosphere; and you can hardly imagine how important atmosphere is to a *savant*. But, while I was prepared to be regarded as a recluse—as a crank, even—it didn't occur to me that I was qualifying to become the pariah of Studdingham!"

He looked so sad and reproachful that it seemed only common humanity to say that he wasn't.

"Oh, it isn't as bad as that," I remarked, with all the gumption I could put into such an awful fib.

"I don't know why I should particularly care," he went on, "but it has kind of got on my nerves, you know. I feel myself boiling in a caldron of resentment, while your friends are cheerfully skimming the grease off the top. It—it's humiliating! I wish I could do what a friend of mine did in London when a Lord Somebody cut him on the street. Followed him, you know, calling out and raising such a hullabaloo, that finally the lord, in self-defense, was compelled to turn round and ask him angrily what was the matter. 'I just wanted to tell you,' said my friend, 'that if you don't want to know me, *you needn't*!' If it wouldn't be asking too much of you, I wish you'd give the same message from me to Studdingham."

He said this so whimsically that I burst out laughing.

"What fools people are!" he continued confidentially. "Here am I complaining because the curate hasn't called, and none of the village bores and busybodies have descended on me. For years I've been looking for a place where I could be stark alone, and now, when I have found it, I can't help feeling slighted and insulted."

"You ought to go off somewhere where you are more appreciated," I said. "Frankly, here you are not a success, and your pro-profession seems to jar on our susceptibilities."

"Profession!" he cried. "Do you mean my puzzles? Good heavens, I hope you don't think that's the only thing I do! I had to gain an independence somehow, and to a man of a mathematical turn that was the easiest way. I got the idea of Bo-peep from an algebraical formula I happened at the time to be using in some experiments. But apart from

all that, is it such a crime to amuse the public?"

"But you tortured them," I said. "Your advertisement is only too true; and really and truly, how can you expect us to be chummy with a man that has maddened a continent!"

He groaned at this, and put out his hand as though to implore me to stop.

"I suppose," he remarked at last, very bitingly, "I suppose that if Sir Isaac Newton had sold peanuts, or Darwin had eked out his income by peddling the 'Life of General Grant,' you'd be quite blind to the trifling additions they made to the store of human knowledge."

"Oh, *I* wouldn't," I said. "But I wouldn't like to answer for Studdingham. Besides—I don't want to be rude, you know—but we see only the peanut side of your career, and, up to now, nobody had even guessed that there was another."

I waited for him to tell me what it was, but he didn't. I couldn't help feeling curious

about it, because he was so handsome, and had such nice eyes, and the way he held back seemed to make it more mysterious and exciting.

"I am a digger," he said at last—"a poor, miserable, lonely digger. I dig and dig, and the deeper I get the less I appear to accomplish. To put it into common English, I am engaged in electrical research, not of the profitable, ingenious, touch-the-button kind, but in the study of some great basic, perhaps insoluble, phenomena that we have been content to name and then ignore—a scientific procedure more universal than you'd think."

He paused, and it seemed only polite on my part to ask him how he was getting on.

"Wait twenty years, and then, perhaps, I'll answer you," he returned. "Have you ever been a victim of those schoolboy jokes, when you open your parcel and then find another parcel inside of that, and another inside of that, and so on and so on? Well, that's what science is, only, in our case, there are a million

more wrappers, and it often takes months to remove a single one!"

"And then you find it's a carrot after all, or a slate pencil," I said. "Oh, yes, I know that joke; though, even as a little girl, I never thought it a particularly good one!"

He smilingly agreed with me. "But Nature has her practical jokes, too, you know, and occasionally revenges herself for all we've robbed her of."

I suppose he caught me glancing at the spark plug, for he suddenly pulled himself up, and his face changed.

"I fear I have taken a great liberty in telling you all this," he went on, in an earnest, troubled tone. "You must make allowances for a man who sees no one—a scientific Crusoe on a desert island, who, in the absorption of one great dominating idea, has forgotten all the petty rules, and, worse still, even runs the risk of proving himself a bore. This meeting, this little talk here in the woods, that means nothing to you, that will be forgotten

in an hour, will remain with me for months to come, the most radiant of memories."

It was rather hard to know what to reply to this. He was so naïve in his admiration, so innocent of any presumption or offense, that it would have been brutal to snub him. Yet I couldn't very well stand there and let him run along on this line. Heaven only knows where he would have got to, because— Oh, well, because— A girl doesn't need a sixth sense to tell her when a man— It seemed a happy thought to turn his electrical abilities to account by asking him to look at my buzzer, and thus sidetrack any more embarrassing confidences. It was lucky I did so, for he found that one of the vibrators was sticking slightly, and had quite a fight to get it into proper shape. Then, when he had screwed down the plug, wired up, and put back the hood covers, he was simply forced to crank up and let me go.

"I suppose it is good-by forever?" he said, looking at me in the most appealing manner,

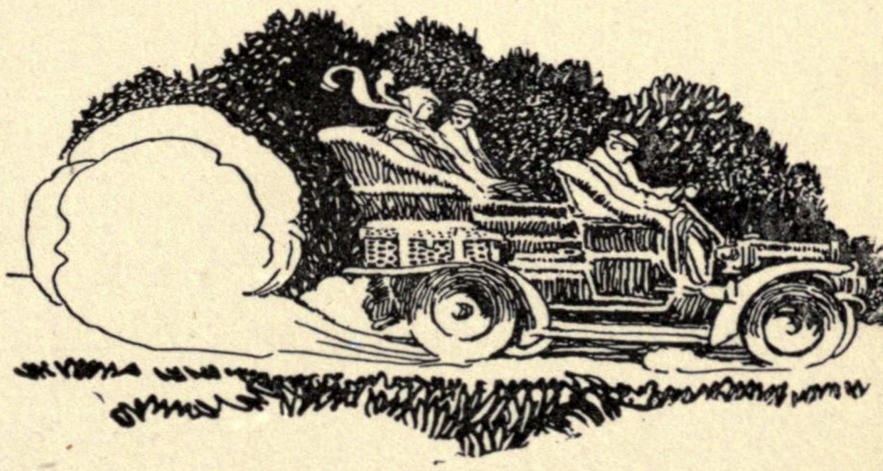
and holding to the car as though it might suddenly jump up and fly away.

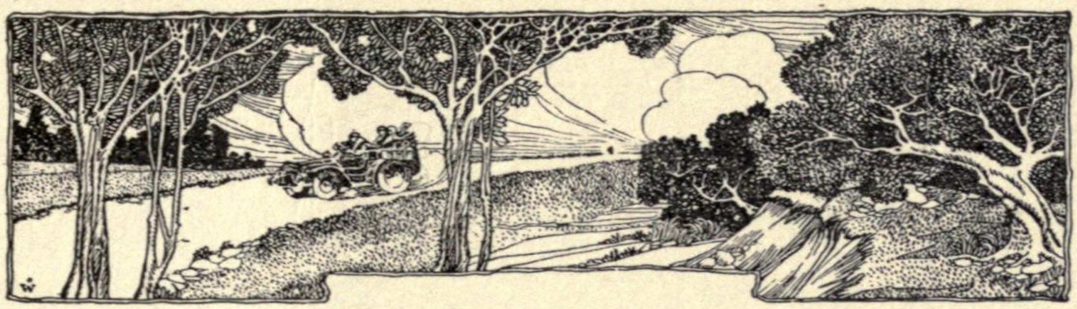
"I am afraid it is, Mr. Marsden," I said, glad to make the matter quite plain. "And much obliged for your kindness," and with that I speeded up, and left him disconsolately in the road. I peeped back through my little window, and felt quite sorry for him.

It was hard to be a pariah, and he was really a charming fellow and wonderfully handsome and nice. If he hadn't been the puzzle king, hadn't maddened a continent, I should have indulged in a little sentiment about him, and wiped away a tear. But a sense of the ridiculous forbade, and I had to smile at myself. Perhaps it helped as a protection. Isn't it strange when a person's eyes can haunt you, and you can hear the tones of his voice? I suppose it was just because he was so out of the ordinary, and unlike anybody I had ever met before; and he was fair, and I was dark—and, oh— Really how can anybody explain those things, anyway?

III

CHEWING UP THE LOW–GEAR





III

CHEWING UP THE LOW–GEAR

I SUPPOSE chewing up that low-gear was the luckiest thing that ever happened. I didn't think so at the time, naturally, as I was eighteen miles from home, and the Bolinas road was so wild and unfrequented that you almost never meet a team. As luck would have it, the stage had passed just ten minutes before it dawned on me that I was in trouble. They talk about being alone in a great city, but getting stranded in the woods with a sick car is forty times worse. Of

course, I had Olaff along, and I can't tell you what a comfort and consolation he was to me. He is a Great Dane, and everybody is afraid of him because he is so big and fierce, and he crowds up a car like a trunk, and has a large, meaty tail there never seems any room for. But, in a tight place, I'd rather have Olaff than any person I know, for he takes being a dog seriously, and would positively have liked to meet a mountain lion, just to show what he could do to it.

So Olaff sat and wagged his tail in the road, while I stripped off the transmission cover and felt inside. The metal band around the low-gear drum had fractured, and it didn't take two looks to see that this part of the outfit had gone out of business. It was made of a special imported unfracturable phospher-something bronze, slotted for lubrication, and I guess the manufacturers must have overdone the slots. Anyway, it was cracked. Even Olaff could see that as he put up his paws and gazed down at it with his head against

mine, with a humorous expression, as though the joke were on us.

The reverse band was all right, and tightened nicely, and my first panic gave way as I saw I was sure to get home. The worst of that Bolinas road was its frightful hilliness, and there was bound to be a lot of working one's passage. So I screwed down the cover again, put on my switch, cranked up, and, getting Olaff on board, proceeded to back Dandy Dick in the direction of Studdingham. It was slow work and needed care, and there was the bothering apprehension of overheating. But I got up one hill all right, and smartly whisking her around on the decline of the next, I managed to throw in my high-speed clutch and scoot. It was like getting a pair of wings, and if the road in front hadn't been all grades, I should have sizzled home in no time.

The next hill wasn't such a terror, and I managed to nurse Dandy to the top by ignoring her little pounds for mercy, and doing

wonders with the spark. But hill number two killed us before we had much more than started, and so I locked my brake and got out to cool. There was no sense in burning up the transmission, and this was plainly a case of making haste slowly. There was such a smell of fried engine, and such an irritable bubbling in the radiator, that to force matters would be to stick the pistons. Autoists are often accused of having no time to admire the scenery they pass through, but I think, what with our breakdowns and our enforced stoppages for adjustments, it would be found that we've absorbed more scenery than most of the horse people. The landscape of a place where you have once been stuck lives with you for years afterwards, and is absolutely ineffaceable. I can see that road now, with Olaff rolling out his tongue, and the stream tinkling at the bottom of the canyon, and every one of the hundred thousand million trees.

Well, after about twenty minutes of scenery, we started to back up some more, and backed

and backed and backed till I thought my head would twist off. I was still hard at it when, high above me, I heard the boo of a horn, and the ponderous slish of a big car rounding the curve. I squeaked Dandy's tooter to save our lives, and straightened up and tried to look dignified, and as though I *preferred* to climb hills on the reverse, and wouldn't have used a first speed if I had had it. In another instant I saw the immense square bonnet of the G. R. A. T. darting into sight, with Mr. Marsden at the wheel, and his face so surprised and gratified at the unexpected sight of me that he almost forgot to ram home his brakes.

I don't know how it happened, but I found myself shaking his hand as though he was my long-lost brother. After all, Olaff mightn't have been equal to a mountain lion, and if ever there was a friend in need it was Mr. Marsden. Have you ever studied anything very hard, and then, after a long rest, discovered that you had learned it? That's true of friendships also, and I could feel we had made

a big jump forward since we had last met. Besides, I was in the humor to like anybody that happened along just then, and so Mr. Marsden was all to the good. I needn't say he was most remarkably nice and kind and obliging, and took right hold as though his only business in life was to tow his friends out of their difficulties. He was so delighted, poor fellow, and seemed to find such a tremendous significance in all the train of events that it led him to taking the Bolinas trail. I was so grateful and relieved that I was quite willing he should see the finger of fate in our meeting, and didn't mind his being so enthusiastic about it.

"I never dreamed I was to have the privilege of speaking to you again," he said. "In fact, I was just on the point of shutting up the house and going away forever."

I suppose it was silly to ask why, but I asked it.

"I haven't the presumption to tell you," he returned, his handsome, sensitive face shad-

owing. "You might misjudge me—yes, you'd be sure to misjudge me. But what was the good of my staying on here, and being utterly wretched?"

I felt awfully sorry for him, because his voice was so sincere and trembling, and I could see he meant *me*.

"I suppose it is hard to be an outcast," I said sympathetically. "Once, at boarding school, I was sent to Coventry for a week because they thought I had caricatured Miss Drayton on the blackboard, while it was really that little sneak, Jessie Tillman, who was afraid to own up; and it nearly killed me."

"Oh, it's not that!" he cried, waving away the suggestion with his hand. "These people are no more to me than so many ants. What hurts me is that I'm prevented from knowing *you*."

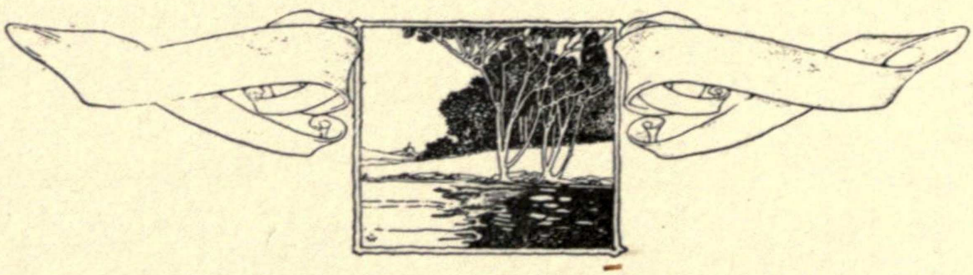
"You seem to have broken through the net, though," I remarked, smiling.

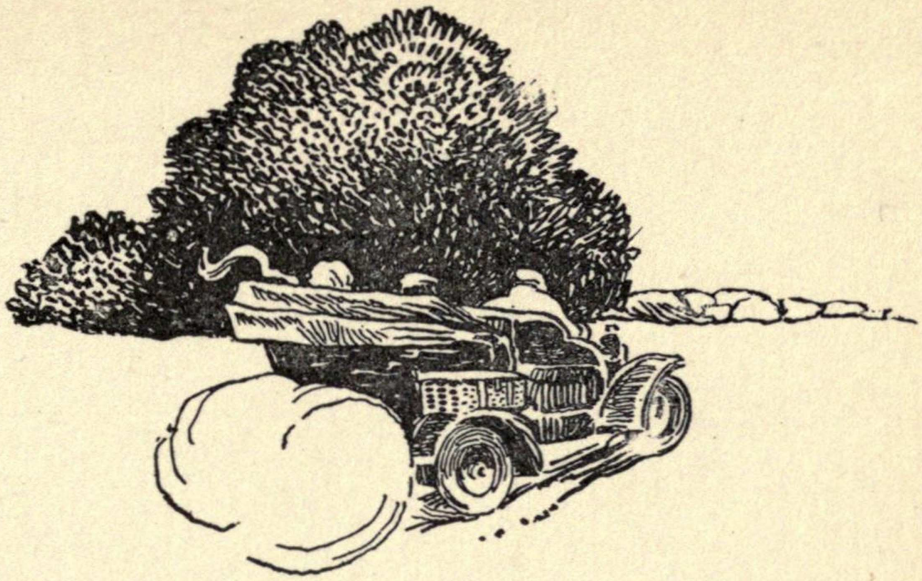
"No, I haven't," he said savagely. "This is just a lucky accident—an accident that may

never occur again. Don't you understand? I should like to come and see you, like other people—bring you flowers, and boxes of candy, and try to persuade you to like me. When a man's in earnest and really cares, it's a shame when he isn't even allowed a chance."

"Let's be sensible, Mr. Marsden," I said. "You know very well I cannot ask you to come and see me; and if you are going to talk like that, I'm not sure I would if I could. We're very conventional people here, and these short cuts of yours across the social grass are alarming."

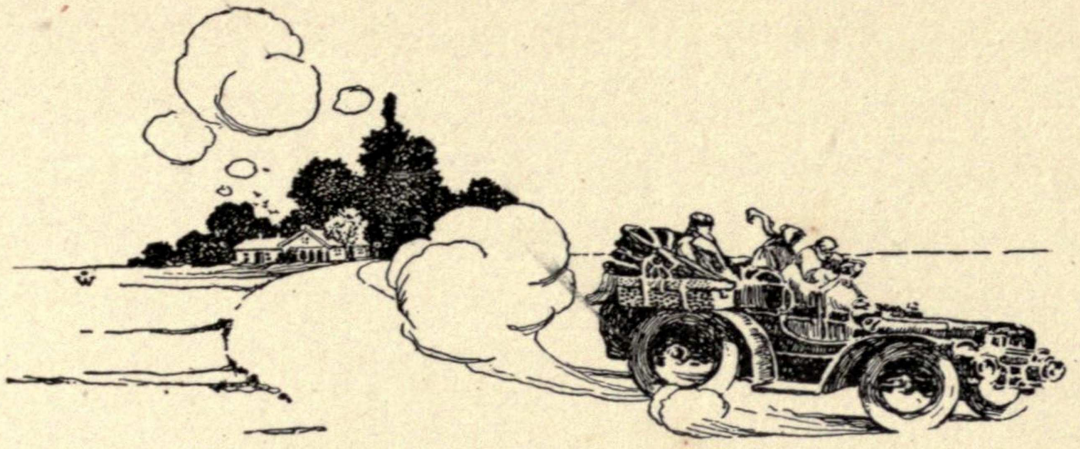
"I love you," he said, with an awfully genuine flash of his eyes. "That's what I meant all the time—that's the cruelest part of it; and these people here have ostracized me so successfully that they've made it an impertinence for me to say it!"





IV

OLAFF SPEAKS OUT



IV

OLAFF SPEAKS OUT

IN my first moment of stupefaction I confess I did not know what to do. A mountain lion seemed almost preferable, and though I ought to have felt awfully angry and insulted, I somehow couldn't do it. I suppose it was because he really meant it, and wasn't pretending. So I simply told him the truth—that he was making me embarrassed and uncomfortable, and that if his regard

amounted to anything, he would stop right there talking about it.

"Don't make it impossible for me to accept a favor from you," I went on. "Things like that sandbag a conversation and make one self-conscious, and put one on one's guard. You will force me to adopt a freezing manner, and protect myself as best I can. Don't you think that would be rather humiliating for both of us?"

Then, of course, being an awfully nice man, he groveled, and acted as though he was awfully grateful at not being killed dead. He begged my pardon over and over again, and got into the transmission to see if it actually *was* a fracture.

"I'll only ask you one thing before I drop the subject," he said very gravely, "and that is, to do me the honor to believe me."

It made me tingle all over to admit I did, but what was the use of fibbing about it? Besides, to have answered otherwise would have provoked a discussion. I was rather flus-

tered, anyway, and kind of glad, too, and thought what beautiful thick wavy hair he had as he bent over the case. It hadn't been love at first sight—on my part, I mean—but it had got very close to the worrying line, and he certainly was tormentingly good looking, and unusually attractive and charming. It made me sigh that he had maddened a continent. Girls are awfully susceptible to the ridiculous, and a puzzle king—oh, no!

"You'd better let me take you home," he said, "and then I can come back with a man and tow Dandy to the shop."

But I wouldn't hear of it. In the first place, I didn't want to be under such an obligation; and, in the second, what was the good of saying die when you have a healthy reverse?

"But it will take you hours and hours," he said.

"You oughtn't mind that," I told him—"not after all you said, and all that I didn't let you say."

You ought to have seen how pleased he looked! Perhaps it was rather forward of me, but I couldn't help it. He was too nice not to tease a little, and after his promise about the tabooed subject, I wasn't afraid to skate all around it. Not that the stern facts of existence were neglected, however. The road was so narrow that he had to back too, having a 114-wheel base, and we both backed and backed and backed, till it would have made a cat laugh. Then we'd cool off, and talk, and back some more. He had some crackers in his kit, and a bottle of fizz water, and we had a sort of lunch, and grew chummier and chummier; even Olaff licking the crumbs off his hand and growing quite friendly—which I thought was a good sign, as Olaff is a regular Bernard Shaw on character, and sees right through people. I told Mr. Marsden he ought to be tremendously complimented; and he said he was, and anybody could see he loved dogs, and really appreciated Great Danes. Nothing would

discourage me more about a man than if he didn't, and there's a heap in that old saying about "Love me, love my dog." Only sometimes the dog won't reciprocate, which in this case, fortunately, didn't happen, and everything was delightful.

It was about noon when we first began to back, and I know that nobody will believe me when I say it took us six hours to reach the county road. Mr. Marsden was very cautious about overheating, and was a great stickler for being on the safe side. Anyway, we'd back and stop, back and stop, back and stop, till we felt we'd been years together and were declining into middle age. We must have stopped fifty times, and as we had a separate talk each time, you can see for yourself that we were bound to get more and more confidential, and steadily advance the spark of friendship.

His whole past life gradually came out, and it was most strange and exciting and pathetic. His father had been the inventor of an ex-

traordinary automatic machine cannon, and wherever there was trouble there was Mr. Marsden's father crazy to show it off. *My* Mr. Marsden, from the time he was nine to fifteen, went along, too, helping to chase up war ministers and wars and revolutions. The pair had the most awful ups and downs, riding one day in gold carriages with kings and dictators, and the next half starving and ignored. His father drew a considerable income from a ship-telegraph patent, and this allowed him to keep his liberty and his gun, and refuse what offers he got for it. And the worst of it was that it wasn't a good gun, and the only people who could make it work properly were Mr. Marsden and his father. But if nobody was very eager to buy it, they were always willing enough to give Mr. Marsden a front seat on the chance of his making good, and thus it was they were always to the fore, and shooting off their wonderful gun.

They averaged a war a year—not big ones, of course, because they don't occur so often,

but little ones in unheard-of places—Herzegovina, Macedonia, Georgia, Morocco. No revolution was complete without Mr. Marsden and his gun, and he always saved the thing from being cold-blooded by siding ferociously with the party he was with. The detested enemy was always in front of Mr. Marsden's wonderful gun, and the people behind it were invariably the downtrodden patriots who were throwing off the despot's yoke. *My* Mr. Marsden told it all with a delicious humor, and an underlying tenderness for his crack-brained father that was most sweet and charming. Indeed, he had a real gift of description, and made my heart beat with the stories of battles and routs, and narrow squeaks, and corpses rotting in the sun—leading up to the time when his father died of fever, and he himself managed to get back to America with nothing more than the clothes he stood in. The ship-telegraph had been superseded by a better invention, and he found himself without a penny in the world, and no

more education than what he had picked up on the march.

"But I was out of the gun business for good," he said, "and thank God for it."

One instinctively sides with the hero in any story—not that Mr. Marsden was that exactly—but in his struggles and hardships and disappointments and the gritty fight he made to get through college and make something of himself and his abilities. Think of the Bo-peep puzzle, for instance. He made it for his landlady's little girl, who was sick in bed, and he too poor to buy her a Christmas present! His big things were all failures, while this unconsidered trifle, whittled out with his jack-knife late one night, and inspired simply by kindness, brought him an unexpected and Heaven-sent independence. He sold it to a syndicate for thirty-five dollars, and only retained half profits because they wouldn't make it one hundred dollars outright.

"Now they are Marsden Incorporated," he said, "and I am under a ten years' iron-clad

contract. Strange how things fall out, isn't it?"

Altogether we were awfully good friends by the time we reached the county road, where Mr. Marsden promised to push Dandy Dick till I could get in the high-speed clutch for what we hoped was the last time. It was good running from there home, you know, and he was to tail along behind, besides, to keep an eye on me. But, of course, it meant saying good-by right there, because if Dandy once got moving there was no stopping her till I got into papa's barn. Mr. Marsden wasn't over-willing to begin, and got very miserable and downhearted, especially when I told him that it wouldn't do for us ever to meet again.

"They might say I was meeting you clandestinely," I said, "and then I'd just lie down and die of mortification. You don't know what a nest of gossips we live in, nor how they tear girls limb from limb. And that's without counting papa, for Heaven only knows what he'd do to me."

Then he groaned—positively groaned—and murmured something about a "way." "Oh, there must be a way!"

"This is one of the places where there isn't any way," I remarked. "Of course, if you could save papa's life, or find him tied to the track and then cut him free, it might break the ice a bit. But it would be just like papa to be grumpy about it, and keep you at arm's length even then."

"Tell me frankly," he cried, "this isn't any subterfuge on your part? It isn't that I'm unpresentable, is it? Would you be ashamed to know me—be friends, I mean—in the ordinary way? I've been so long a pariah that I'm beginning to lose my nerve. Yet you haven't acted as though there was any real gulf between us."

"Only papa," I said. "But that's a mile wide and ten deep. Oh, no, Mr. Marsden, I like you ever so much, and I think you are nicer and lots more interesting than all the men here put together." (I wanted to pile it

on, because it was true, you know, and I felt most awfully sorry for him, and it seemed so unjust and wrong that I couldn't meet him properly—only through cracked porcelains and chewed-up low-gears.)

"Then it just comes down to this: I have to meet your father, and simply force him to like me."

It seemed tame to remind him that this was easier said than done. Making papa like you wasn't an affair of touching a button. And, if anything, he was more ferocious than ever about losing the Vincents, and his dislike of Mr. Marsden had become a monomania. That's the trouble about a man who's been good-natured all his life, and never had an enemy except the legislature; when at last he finds one he won't let it go. I believe papa actually enjoyed being a Marsden-phoboist.

"There is something in what you said just now," he went on meditatively. "I must get him into a tight place and save him."

"It can't be done," I said. "Papa's been

saved only once in his life, and then it was the First National Bank, and it took three million dollars."

"A little plan has been running through my head for the last hour," he persisted. "Possibly you noticed my interest in the Lampmans' fancy-dress ball, and how I drew you out about it? I think I could use it to advantage if I could count on you to help me."

My face must have expressed my misgiving. I didn't want to promise in the dark. A girl has always to be on her guard, and though he was very fascinating and all that, I still had a little sense. I wouldn't have any harm come to my father for a hundred thousand Marsdens. He was quick to see what was passing in my head, and gazed at me more and more despairingly.

"I suppose it is crazy for me to try," he said, "but I wouldn't be halfway a man if I didn't. You haven't gone back from what you told me?"

"What did I tell you?"

"That you liked me, I mean. That under happier circumstances, you would give me the same chance that your other men friends have to—to——"

I rather hoped he'd go on, but he didn't. The way he broke off, and clenched his hands, was terribly eloquent, and anybody could see it was the real thing. It was almost in self-defense that I looked at my watch, gave a little scream, and begged him to push Dandy and not delay me another minute.

"All I want to ask you is this," he broke out. "Be sure you go to the ball, and make your father go, too—in the Dauntless, of course—and leave the Lampmans' exactly at two o'clock. Will you do this for me? May I count on it absolutely? The happiness of my whole life depends on it."

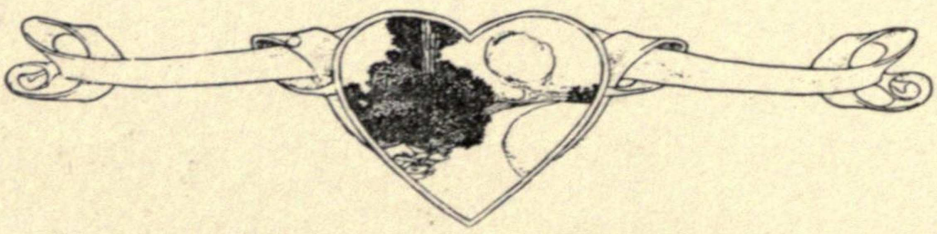
He caught my hand and held it so appealingly, so devotedly, that it wasn't in flesh and blood to say No; especially as I was going to the Lampmans' anyway—papa, Dauntless, and all—and the only real favor was the two-

o'clock part of it. So I made a great deal of saying Yes, I would, and then he heaved away at Dandy, and with a lot of shoving got me started. I gave him a double toot to cheer him up, while the G. R. A. T. pounded along behind, ready to help out if need be, and Olaff smiled at me quizzically with his blood-shot eyes.

"Homeward bound, old dog," I said, and then I whispered, "Olaff, do you believe in love at first sight?" And what do you suppose that wonderful old dog did?

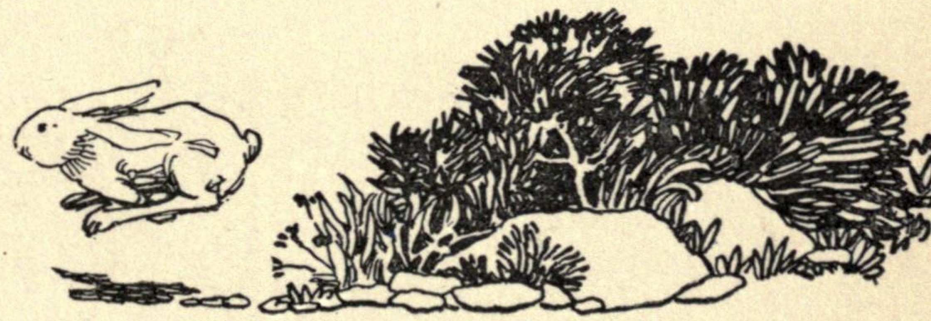
Nodded—positively *nodded*—and uttered a loud, enthusiastic bark.

It's such a comfort to have a dog you can always agree with!—who always knows the right thing to bark, and barks it. Papa says he has enough sense to run a Democratic State Committee. Papa is a Republican.



V

THE HOBGOBLINEST PLACE ON THE MAP



V

THE HOBGOBLINEST PLACE ON THE MAP

THE Lampmans lived in a castle about eighteen miles from Studdingham. They had found it in Lombardy—the castle, I mean—and reproduced it from kodak pictures they had taken over there. It was named Ydle Wyld, and was so big that, though they had lived in it comfortably for three years, it was only now actually getting finished, and the masquerade ball was to be the long-promised housewarming. Ydle Wyld was perched high up on a spur of Mt. Pacheco, and you

had to follow twelve miles of private road to reach it. The Lampmans were very quiet people in spite of their castle, and would have stayed on very comfortably in the St. Francis Hotel had it not been for Sammy Lampman, their son. Sammy was a sickly boy of seventeen, very pale and imaginative, who was forced by the doctors to lead a very secluded life. So, when he demanded a castle, a castle there had to be, and the good old senator had to put in a big part of his day traveling from Ydle Wyld to State Street, and from State Street to Ydle Wyld. Their visit to Europe had been to see specialists, who were very doubtful whether poor Sammy would ever round out twenty-one.

The papers were always making fun of Ydle Wyld, especially those on the other political side; and it was called a menace to republican ideals, and was regarded as an insolent attempt to revive the feudal system. But the senator bore it uncomplainingly for his son's sake, and imported stacks of tapestry

and armor and mediæval junk to give it the appropriate look. He told papa once, that if Sammy died, he intended making it over to the Baptists for a college; which shows how much menace there was, and how sad the motive that had inspired its building.

Well, the housewarming was to be a gigantic affair—eight hundred invitations—and a whole month to get ready in. And when I say that even papa was excited, you can imagine what the rest of Studdingham felt like. I guess poor Mr. Marsden was the only person in the place who wasn't having a fit about his costume—that isn't a pun—but because he wasn't asked. It may be that he was pretty busy, too, with his wonderful "plan," and needed less sympathy than I was giving him. He was a lot in my thoughts, anyhow, and sometimes I almost cried, and wondered if I'd ever see him again. It all seemed so hopeless and impossible, and I had got it into my head that his "plan" wasn't any good. You see, I sounded papa, and found him just

as red-hot as ever—and, if anything, red-hotter—raging against Mr. Marsden, and bringing up the Vincents, as though it had happened yesterday. When papa once gets a grouch on, Time's healing hand doesn't count for anything; and mamma was hardly any better. In a small place, once a person's an outcast, they make a kind of rubbish heap of him, and pile on all the crimes of the calendar, from morphine to manslaughter—all the tin cans and broken bottles of slander and innuendo—till it grows to be a mountain!

I tried to put in a good word or two, but it wasn't of the faintest use, since mamma was now certain he was a vivisectionist, and papa said those morose, sullen fellows, who make hermits of themselves, invariably ended in homicidal mania. I hinted at electrical research, but papa said, "Oh, bosh!" and that it was more likely to be the whisky bottle. I didn't argue any further, because I was too afraid and too hurt—and what was the good? But I took a kind of morbid pleasure in think-

ing I had fought his battles and got licked, and hoped some day that I'd be able to tell him so. It is strange how liking a man grows and grows, till finally you can't think of anything else. It must have been because he was thinking of me, and breaking his poor, lonely heart. It's all very well to make fun of affinity, but I never felt like that about Charlie Lepperts, even when I used to believe I loved him.

I was to go as Mary Queen of Scots, and it seemed a good idea to tag papa along as Bothwell, and do up mamma for Queen Elizabeth. She was willing enough—mamma is a darling when my pleasure is at stake; but papa resisted and resisted, till finally it came out he wanted to be a bandit. He had been to three fancy-dress balls in his whole life, and each time as a bandit, and he seemed to think it was original and striking. He said that anybody could tell a bandit was a bandit a mile off, and that for an elderly man making a fool of himself, a bandit always seemed to him the

least silly of the lot. But when I talked of a shining cuirass, and what a stunning group we'd make, and found that he had mixed up Bothwell with the man who had invented printing—and had teased and flattered and bullied him—he gave in about being a bandit, and said, "Oh, hell, have it your own way, my dear."

Well, there we were at nine o'clock that evening, papa smoking a cigar and gasping in his breastplate, mamma really beautiful as Queen Elizabeth, and I very pleased with myself as Mary Queen of Scots; and all of us tremendously excited and gay, and the Dauntless standing on the front gravel with its gas lights lit, and full of rugs for a long ride, when the butler came running to say that Albert had been taken with cramps. Of all times to choose for cramps, think of him picking out that night of the ball!

Papa went off to make short work of the cramps, and came back looking very depressed.

"Tell them to send for the doctor," he said. "I don't know what's the matter with him, but he's groaning horribly, and needs looking after quick."

While mamma went off to telephone, papa began to do fuss-cat about the Dauntless. Papa's a brave man in most things, and his courage was about the only capital he came West with; but it balked at running the touring car single-handed. There was never such an old woman on the bubble question. He can get more wear and tear out of one sooty spark plug, more nervous worry, desperation, and despair, than most men from a whole lifetime of crime or politics; and that's where Albert had this awful hold on him. He had quite got it into his head—helped by Albert, of course—that without this mechanical human wonder it was hopeless to expect the Dauntless to run a yard. If she snaps a wire, or sticks anywhere, papa always looks on at Albert as though he was watching Edison invent the first phonograph. I hate to say it

about my own father, but he's *afraid* of an automobile, and spoils anything like a trip by his remarks. He's always saying, "We must remember that shed; Albert and I could easily push her in that shed"; or, "That's a very handy-looking little machine shop; I wonder if it's on the telephone? Setzer and Hoffman"—and then he keeps repeating Setzer and Hoffman for the next half hour for fear he might forget it. And when it comes to a choice of routes, he has a pathetic desire to follow the trolley! That's papa for you—as an automobilist! And, like all those people who borrow trouble, he has found it by the barrelful—and once had to sleep out all night in the woods.

So there was papa, looking perfectly superb in his brass cuirass and theater boots, marching up and down, jingling like the fire irons, and trying to find a million reasons why we shouldn't take the Dauntless. He wanted to get the horses out, and drive, and grew crosser and crosser as I told him he was a great big coward, and the disgrace of the family. What

was the good of a four-thousand-dollar car, in tiptop shape, if it couldn't be trusted for an eighteen-mile run? Papa said that was all very well, but a pretty figure he'd cut trying to push it in shining armor, and stumbling over his broadsword in the dark. In fact, he was so morbid and apprehensive and harrowing that it was about as easy as persuading a French aristocrat in the Revolution to get aboard the tumbril that was to land him at the guillotine. Then, after he had been reduced to pulp, he said weakly that he would leave it to mamma to decide, and threw himself on a hall chair and waited—to think up fresh reasons why it was impossible to take the Dauntless without Albert.

I fully thought she'd join with him and insist on the horses, but for once, in a family disagreement, she came out splendidly on the right side—*my* side—and said, "Oh, my dear, it would be perfectly crazy not to take the car, when it is standing there all ready." So there was nothing left for papa to do but sigh, and

say, "Oh, all right, only don't blame me if anything happens." And we both cheered him up by saying how handsome he looked, and what a pity it was he couldn't dress like that every day, and how he was sure to be the hit of the evening. Indeed, it wasn't his fault that he was such an automobile fraidy-calf, but more that wily Albert's, who had deliberately discouraged him from the beginning so as to boom his own importance. And that night in the woods had cost papa all the little assurance he ever had had, and had inclined him to take a dark view of his own capacity, and what the Dauntless was likely to do if Albert wasn't there to over-awe it.

We started off so nicely that papa began to chirp up, and after a mile or two even bragged a little, and spun around corners in grand style; and when we caught up with the Lepperts and passed them, papa was as pleased as he could be, and never said Albert once, except to ask about the doctor, and how he hoped it wasn't serious. We made Ydle Wyld

in rattling time, and even papa was thankful we hadn't brought the horses as we broke into the crowd of cars and carriages and four-in-hands that were seething in the place that had been set apart for them. It was said the Lampmans had invited eight hundred, but it looked more like eight thousand, when we struck that circus and bored our way through the crush to where we were told to park.

Of course, the ball itself was too wonderful for anything, and I never fully realized before what clothes could do for people. The change from business suits to cloth of gold and armor and velvet and lace and white satin, was astonishing; and as for the women, it only seemed to need powder and patches to make everyone of them a raving beauty. It made me feel badly, at first, just to find myself one of a crowd, for I had expected— Oh, well—thought that they'd fall dead at the sight of me; and it cost me a pang when they didn't. But after a while a few got excited about me, and the few swelled and swelled, and it all came out right.

A ball is an awful ruthless affair, and a girl's pride is at stake, you know, to have a little court around her and attract attention. Besides, I had to show Charlie Lepperts what a good thing he had lost, and just *had* to be a success. Well, I was, though I do say it myself, and you didn't have to look very far to see which was the most popular girl in that Gothic hall. Why shouldn't I say it? The old soldier brags of his battles, and balls are ours, you know, and why shouldn't we brag, too? And everybody fell over everybody, and shoved and pushed to get in a dance with darling little me.

Occasionally I'd remember Mr. Marsden, and my Cinderella date at two o'clock, and tingle all over with the most delicious thrills. I didn't know what he meant to do, but I felt sure it was something tremendous, and hoped from the bottom of my heart it wouldn't all go wrong. It was exhilarating to be a heroine of wild romance, and to feel that out there in the dark was a mysterious stranger mysteri-

ously plotting, and whispering my name to the stars, you know. At least I hope he did! At any rate, I felt sure he was pretty busy doing something, and even in the maddest whirl I kept a sharp eye on my watch.

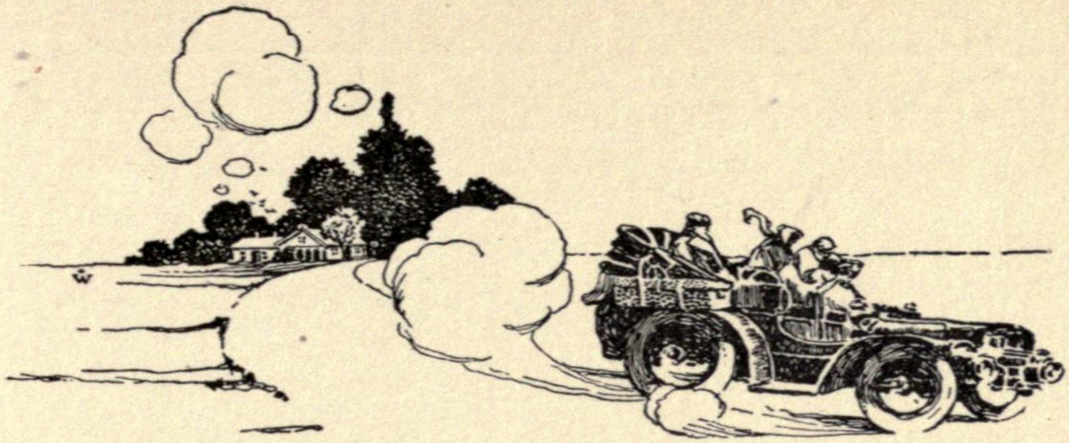
At a quarter of two, just as I had finished an extra with a delightful young troubadour named Edgar Smith, I decided it was time to draw out and find papa. So, chasing up mamma, and accepting the troubadour's escort, we three made a course for one of the supper rooms, where a passing brigand told us he was playing poker. Sure enough he was, snugged cozily in a corner with a policeman, Alfred the Great, and Captain Kidd; and mighty hard work it was, too, to drag him out. Papa's like the pig that you had to pull his head off to get to a party, and his tail off to get him away. He didn't want to come a bit, and said, "Oh, bother! What's the hurry?"

I let him play out his game and lose eight dollars, and then yanked him off, saying I was a little faint and wanted to leave. There was

more delay in saying good night to our host and hostess, and it was all of two when we packed into the Dauntless and choo-chooed away. It was the nicest part of the ball to lie back in the cushions and feel that the Marsden moment had arrived. If men get a lot of pleasure in doing things and taking the lead, I guess there's something to be said for the girl's side of it, too—being the lovely prize, you know, and just waiting for the Beautiful Prince to hatchet his way to her. So I rubbed on a little powder in the dark, shut my lovely eyes, and waited and wondered. I didn't know what was coming, of course, and was almost as much bluffed as anybody when the silly engine began to miss—yes, slowed down, and finally stopped in the pitchiest, inkiest, hobgoblinest place on the map, about seven miles from Ydle Wyld and ten from anywhere else!

VI

THE G. R. A. T. TO THE RESCUE



VI

THE G. R. A. T. TO THE RESCUE

PAPA said a swear, unbuckled his sword, and then got out to crank. He cranked and cranked, and still nothing happened to speak of, except a poor little cough when once or twice she started. I suspected it meant too little gasoline, and told him so; a thin mixture always stops with a cough, and an over-rich one with a dull, heavy sound. But papa, with the dreary thoroughness of a railroad president, tried out the primary circuit,

then the secondary, then the buzzer, and by that time anything you said to him he took as an insult. It was disturbing not to be certain whether this was part of Mr. Marsden's plan, or a horrible accident that might spoil everything. Anyway, we were stuck sure, and I was made to get out and hold a horrid lamp while papa fumed and swore.

The simplest adjustments are troublesome to make at night, and take ten times longer. You lose your tools, burn your fingers, and gradually work up to a state of fiendish exasperation. Papa took out the four plugs, connected them up, and then thought the batteries had given out because they didn't spark. It was as much as my life was worth to tell him he hadn't ground them properly, and at first he nearly snapped my head off. Don't think I'm blaming him. A gas engine would try a saint; and there he was, all trussed up in shining armor, and, as he said, feeling forty different kinds of a damn fool.

But he was immensely impressed when, with

the aid of a big wrench, I had the four plugs sparking nicely. He was just recovering some of his usual geniality, when he laid a finger on that wrench, and got thirty thousand volts through him! What he said can't be repeated, though part of it was lost by his leaping in the air. But the shock did him good, and I went up ten points as a gas engineer. He said quite humbly to tell him what to do, and he'd do it, and rolled up his sleeves, and got out a wad of cotton waste as though he was in for an all night job. I kept him there for an hour—the longest hour of his life, as he said afterwards—and he was so willing and patient and obedient that it almost brought the tears to my eyes.

I was right about that cough, and an examination of the carburetor showed that it wouldn't flood, and that consequently the engine was getting no gas. I made poor papa take it all to pieces, and run hairpins through the spray nozzle, and sandpaper the guides of the float. Then he put it back, and still there

was nothing doing. The next stage was to order papa underneath the car, and make him break all the gasoline connections to see if there wasn't a stoppage somewhere in the line. He had to do this in the dark, of course, because it wasn't safe to hold a lighted lamp too close; and it was a most bumpy and depressing performance for a Bothwell at 2.30 A.M. Then he ran wires through the silly tubes, and blew through them, and screwed them back; and there, if you please, was the carburetor stone dry, and not a penny the better for his work. Then mamma, who was shivering with a lap robe around her like an Indian, said she was sure that the tank was empty. And papa said, "By Jove, perhaps it is!" And I said, "What idiots we are never to have looked!"

But it wasn't empty. Papa put his finger in and drew it out, all wet. It was only down about four inches from the top, and there were gallons and gallons. Mamma asked us why we didn't turn the handle some more, and I

was just on the point of explaining that there was no good cranking when your carburetor was out of whack, when papa took her at her word, and the miserable old engine *started.* Yes, and ran beautifully, chump-chumping like an '06.

"I don't know anything about them," said mamma complacently, "but I felt sure Albert would have turned that handle, and that's why I suggested it. Why, I've seen Albert turn it for an hour at a time, till I waited for him to drop dead!"

It did not seem worth while to argue with her while the engine was so evidently on her side, and I didn't even try. Besides, I was too tired and sleepy to care very much. It was running, that was the great thing, and if it chose to defy all the laws of mechanics, why should I make a fuss about it? By this time poor papa was half dead with worry and exhaustion, and it showed how chewed up he was that he asked me to take the wheel.

"I've had all the automobiling I can stand,"

he said. "For Heaven's sake, let me lie back and smoke a cigar, and get the taste of that filthy stuff out of my gullet!"

So we all hopped in, and I speeded her up with an uneasy feeling that it was all too good to last. Sure enough, we hadn't gone fifty yards, when we began to miss and splutter and die all over again. Then the engine gave a dreadful cough, and went finally and completely out of business.

I was for getting out and having another fight with it, but papa laid his hand on my arm and said No, he'd be hanged if he'd monkey with the blankety-blank thing again, or allow me to do it, either. Said we'd just wait there till the ball broke up, and somebody happened along to tow us, or give us a lift. I never saw the bounce so taken out of papa; even his voice was changed and dreary, as though he had suddenly grown twenty years older in an hour. So we all sat there in the most awful gloom, and said things about that engine that ought to have made it squirm.

Papa swore he had never liked autos, had never approved of them, and had only bought one under an insane compulsion. Said he had known only one human being who could make a car go, and that was Albert; and rubbed in horse, horse, horse, and gave a list of the things he'd eat, from his hat to a pair of gum boots, if he'd ever allow himself to be caught out again without Albert.

We were in these depths of misery and depression when we heard the sound of a car coming along behind us. Papa jumped out and swung the lantern in the middle of the road, so as to stop it. There was a glare of lamps, a whir of gears, and then a man's voice asking through the dark, "What's the matter?" As far as we could judge, he seemed most friendly and accommodating, though at a ten yards' distance, and with his engine running idle it was impossible to follow the conversation. But a moment after, we saw papa leading him up to us, and lo and behold, it was Mr. Marsden! Yes, in evening dress,

and a fur coat with a big collar, and so concerned and helpful and kind, that, if he had been Albert, papa would scarcely have been more delighted.

"Here's an angel from heaven," said papa genially, by way of introduction, "and we are going to be tied on behind and towed home."

Mr. Marsden raised his hat, and begged permission to ask a few questions about our car.

"I've had a great deal of experience," he said, "and if she hasn't a fracture anywhere, perhaps I can find out what's the matter, and put it right."

Papa gazed at him with grateful incredulity, and then talked carburetor and gasoline line for a solid five minutes. He had learned an awful lot in that hour, and rattled it off like an expert.

"Permit me to look at the carburetor," said Mr. Marsden, as though he was asking the greatest favor. Papa graciously said he might, and held the lamp while Mr. Marsden jumped the plunger up and down, and thought

and thought. Then he put his knife in the commutator, and sampled the buzz on each contact. Then with his hands he traced the gasoline line underneath the wagon.

"Would you mind getting out?" he said to me, as though he had never seen me in his whole life before, and looking wonderfully handsome and distinguished in his white waistcoat. "I'd like to see the tank—if you really don't mind, and if it is not too much trouble."

I didn't mind, and it wasn't too much trouble; and then he lifted off the seat, with the same quiet, resourceful doctor-manner that he had shown all through. He undid the screw-top, and, carrying it well away from the car, examined it carefully by the flicker of papa's lantern.

"Here's your trouble," he said.

"I don't see anything wrong with it," remarked papa, gazing at it as though it might suddenly jump up and bite him.

"No air aperture—that's all," said Mr.

Marsden. "The air aperture is choked with dirt. Your tank feeds by gravity, doesn't it? Well, then, it can't flow without air, any more than a kerosene can, if you don't jab a hole in the corner. Same thing precisely."

"Great Scott!" cried papa.

"Why, if you'd only asked me I could have told you that myself," spoke up mamma.

"Oh, how simple!" cried I. "And yet we might have stayed here a week and never found it out!"

"It cost me a lot of time myself, once," said Mr. Marsden deprecatorily, as though he didn't want to shame us by his superiority. "It's about the most effective way of killing a gas engine I can think of."

"Let's put it back and make sure you are right," said papa, still unable to believe the good news.

Well, of course, with a little tickling she went off like a shot—with a great big honest chug-chug that warmed one's heart to hear it. After you have been stuck for hours, I

don't know any sweeter music than an engine that has suddenly made up its mind to reform, and take you home. You are a horse person, I know, and this doesn't appeal to you. Well, suppose every now and then your horse fell dead, and it was up to you to revive it! Wouldn't it be a blessed moment when the corpse would stagger to its feet and neigh? Laugh, if you like, but I guess you'd call it music, too, wouldn't you?

Papa was so grateful to Mr. Marsden that he hardly knew how to say it. He wrung his hand again and again and overflowed; and anybody looking on would have thought he had just saved all our lives—Mr. Marsden, I mean. And so he had, of course, and more, too; for papa was morbidly conscious of his armor and pirate boots, and knew what a figure he had cut before a whole dragful of people home from the ball. Mr. Marsden had rescued him from a horrible mortification, because no one could have helped laughing, you know—what with his having a big lick

of grease over one eye, and rattling when he walked, and covered with tin daggers!

"May I not come part of the way with you?" asked Mr. Marsden. "It isn't right to expose these ladies to another breakdown, and possibly I might again be of assistance."

He hadn't got the words out of his mouth before papa had closed with his offer. It was snapped up like lightning. Papa had no shame left, and held on to him like a life belt. He'd hardly let him go back to his own car to order his chauffeur to follow, and was on pins and needles lest he'd never come back. And the things he said in that interval! Mr. Marsden's ears must have tingled. I never saw papa so worked up over anybody in his life, and naturally I added my little mite, and mamma threw in hers. It was a regular Marsden boom, with all of us trying to outdo the other, as though there was a prize for the one who could say the nicest things about him. Papa won easily by talking the loudest and banging on the mud guard to emphasize his

remarks, indicating that he was going to spend the rest of his life in being good to Mr. Marsden.

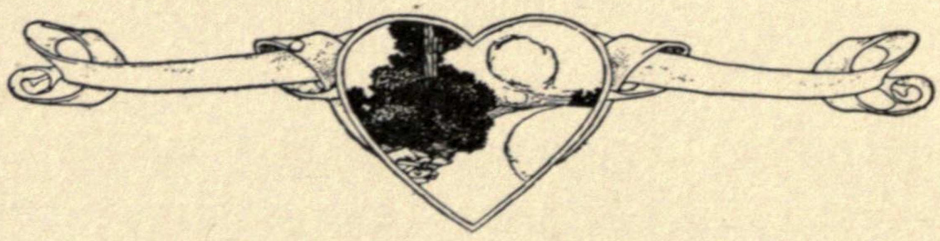
"I didn't know there were men like that left!" he exclaimed. "It makes you feel that human nature has been misrepresented; and he's so unaffected and generous that you'd almost think the favor was on our side. A perfect stranger who will be good to you at four o'clock in the morning, and put himself to no end of trouble for people he doesn't know from Adam—I'd like to give him a house and lot!"

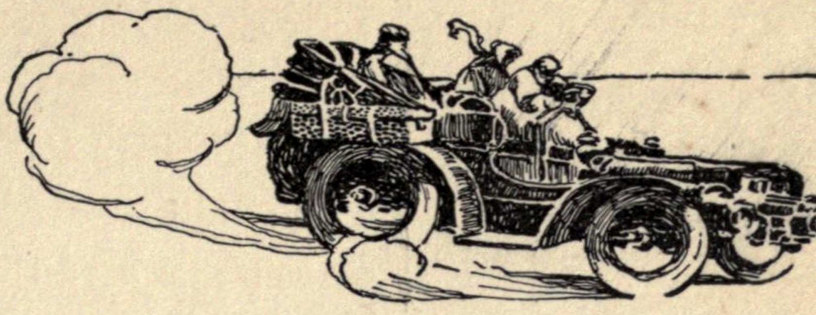
Then Mr. Marsden came back, so brisk and kind and jolly and full of fun, that the contagion of it seemed to spread, and we all began to laugh ourselves. Papa gave Mr. Marsden the driving seat, and said he could have the sword, too, if he wanted it, not to speak of the breastplate. Perhaps it doesn't sound very funny now, but we roared over it at the time, because we were all keyed up, and in the humor to make a joke of anything. And it

was most exhilarating to whiz through the pitchy black roads, and think how, only a few minutes before, we had been shivering like lost souls beside two tons of refractory iron.

Well, so we all got home, and as we stood there on the gravel, hardly knowing how to separate, nor very much wanting to, mamma said she hoped our acquaintance wouldn't end there, and that her day was Friday. And papa said, "You bet, of course you must come," and demanded his card, explaining that he was Mr. Tillinghast, of the K. and O.

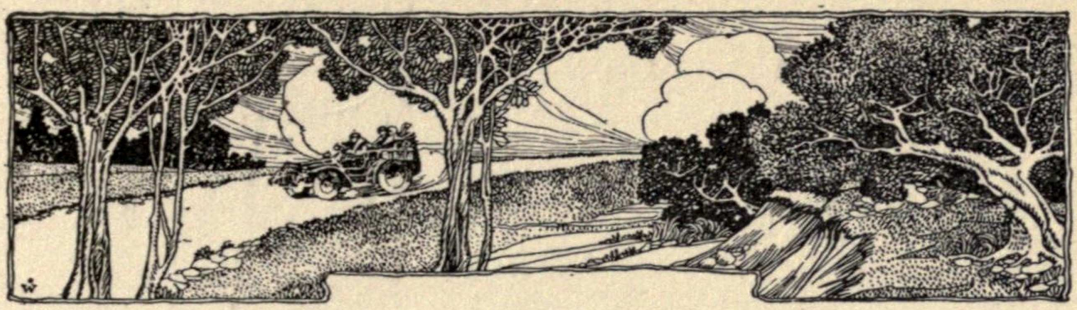
"I'm afraid to give it to you," said Mr. Marsden, reluctantly drawing a card from his pocket, and smiling queerly as he held on to it tight, and wouldn't let papa take it. "I've been unfortunate enough to incur—Well, it has to come out sooner or later, Mr. Tillinghast, and why not now? I am George Marsden."





VII

CASHING IN



VII

CASHING IN

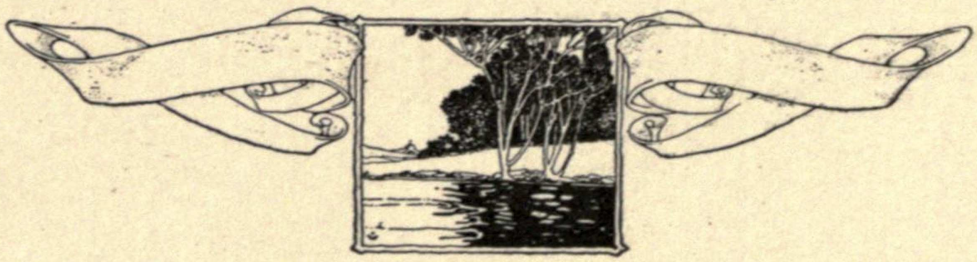
"GEORGE MARSDEN!"

There was a staggering pause.

"Mr. Marsden," said papa, when he had somehow got his breath, "I'm an old fellow, and I dare say I'm pretty pigheaded, but I'm not too old and too pigheaded to admit having made a mistake. You and I have got to be friends, and there's my hand on it!"

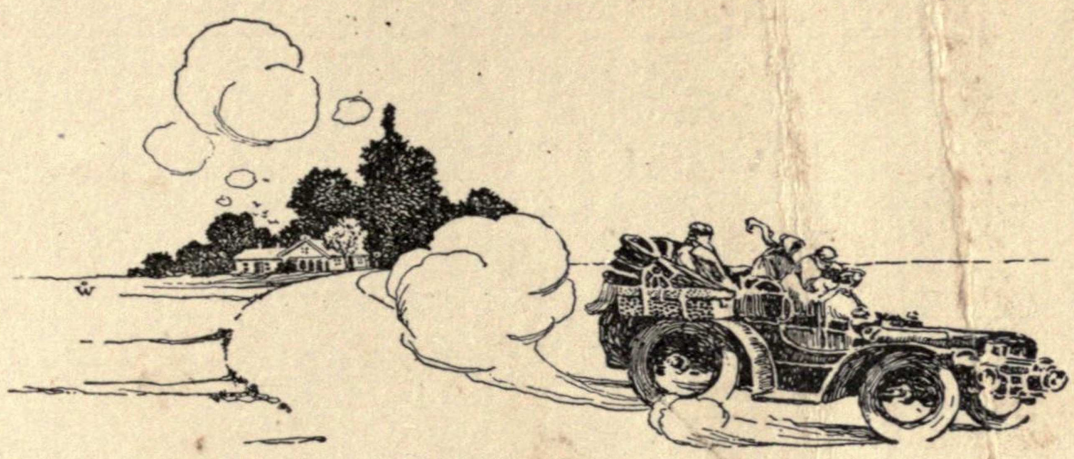
We all gave him our hands on it, and I added a little squeeze extra. Then he asked was he to run the car into the barn, and papa

said Yes, and would I show him the way. And—and—wasn't it foolish of him to risk everything by kissing me in the dark!—just when he had made such headway, and broken into society! I was awfully cross about it, and made a great favor of forgiving him. But he said he really couldn't help it, and so I let him off with a dreadful warning—while he held my hand, and listened like an angel, only interrupting to say he loved me, and that it was the happiest night of his life. And then I asked him was it truly? And he seemed to think the proper answer was to kiss me again —which perhaps it was.



VIII

THREE YEARS AFTERWARDS



VIII

THREE YEARS AFTERWARDS

DO you know what he had done—I mean, besides paying Albert a hundred dollars for those cramps? Substituted another screw top to the gasoline tank, with a watch-spring attachment that was timed to close the air aperture at the end of forty minutes! And then, under the cover of the darkness, he gives us back the original nicely plugged with dirt. You couldn't get ahead of a man like that, could you? When he really proposed, I saw

there was no good putting up a fight—what was the use?—so I took him. Guess I had to, just to save trouble.

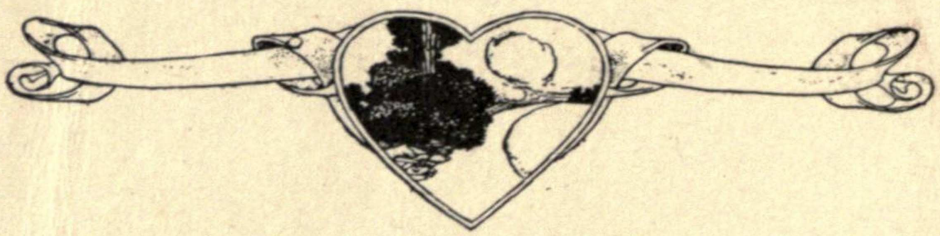
Glad I did it, now.

There have to be a few happy couples, you know, just to balance up.

Oh, yes, I'm crazy to have you meet my husband! Come along, I guess we'll find him in the front part of the ship, exercising Olaff. That's his job, you know, while it's mine to run the baby. Yes, that's my little cherub over there, kicking the old gentleman. That's papa's end of it, you know. In this family everybody works but mamma.

(1)

THE END



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